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Doing from Being:
Creating Organizational Integrity Through Mindful Self-Leadership

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Abstract

Mindfulness in the workplace is a subject that has seen significant growth in recent years. Mindfulness, which is rooted in ancient contemplative practice, has gained much traction among Western audiences over the last few decades. The application of Mindfulness practices is prevalent now in workplaces, where its efficacy has been well-documented, and impact has included the reduction of employee stress, increased productivity, and enhancement of one's well-being.

The principles of mindfulness can be applied across disparate workplace settings and in nearly any situation to help bolster employees' presence and focus in the day-to-day and retain them in the place of employment. Additionally, in the context of rapid technological advancement and ever-increasing pressures in the workplace, the practice of mindfulness can be especially beneficial in helping individuals stay calm and grounded. In fact, with high-stress jobs and modern life moving at a frantic pace, it is increasingly important for individuals to become and stay attuned to their core values. Values can enable grounding and steadfastness among employees in times of chaos and uncertainty, which can help promote stability within and across the organization.

As organizational cultures shift and leadership structures become increasingly horizontal, employees at all levels are being encouraged to lead within their realm. Thus, surfacing the importance of self-leadership in promoting organizational integrity. The potential power of self-leadership as a mechanism to better individual and organizational well-being is the basis of *Doing from Being*, a mindfulness curriculum described in this paper, that aims to harness the focus and commitment of individuals in promoting their own well-being and consequently the health of their workplace.

Doing from Being: Creating Organizational Integrity Through Mindful Self-Leadership

Leadership frameworks within organizations are undergoing a renaissance. The more common top-down leadership structures of the past are quickly evolving into more horizontal structural models. Consensus decision-making is becoming a norm which requires contribution and more responsibility from every member in an organization. Leadership is becoming a more collective activity, driven by community (Senge and Kaeufer 2001; Fletcher and Kaeufer 2003; Fletcher 2004). As leadership evolves, so should the definition of leader. A leader today could be broadly defined as anyone who is in a position to influence another. This could be the CEO of a major corporation or a low-level manager. Every individual is considered to be a leader. One could think of the title 'leader' less as a role and more of an ongoing, dynamic activity. A major thinker who studies this shift in leadership thinking, MIT professor Otto Scharmer, focuses on collective or distributive leadership and the potential of all people to affect change, regardless of title or position. "Leadership in this century means shifting the structure of our collective attention – listening – on all levels" (Scharmer, 2016, p. 18). Scharmer quotes Jeffrey Hollender, the founder and former CEO of Seventh Generation, "Leadership is about being better able to listen to the whole than anyone else can" (Scharmer, 2016, p. 19). Organizations are becoming more reliant on all individuals contributing to the collective. The organization is beginning to look more like an organism. In order to be relevant and contributive within this structure, an entirely new skill set is required, one that applies not just to becoming a more skilled worker, but to becoming a more whole human being.

The most important point to be made in this thesis is that to be an effective leader within this collective structure, one must become an effective leader of themselves. It would be impossible to contribute to the level of one's greatest potential if one is unfamiliar with the landscape of their interiority. A powerful tool to become familiar with this inner landscape and

that every individual has at their disposal is the skill of mindfulness. Jon-Kabat Zinn (1994) defines mindfulness as, "...paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p. 3). Scharmer (2016) defines mindfulness as, "...the capacity to attend to your experiences, while also paying attention to your attention. It requires a shift in your awareness to a higher level: seeing yourself form the whole" (p. xxvii). Simply put, mindfulness is a way of seeing things exactly as they are without the obfuscation of opinion, judgment, or conditioning. When directed inward, with the intention of understanding one's own values, motivations, and patterns, mindfulness can help foster the capacity to transform not only an individual's life, but one's family, relationships, organization and community. Mindfulness is not simply a self-help technique that experts tell us will improve our lives, it is a way of being in and understanding the world as well as a way of being in communal harmony with others.

In a world of ever-increasing busyness and speed the need for mindfulness is ever-critical in helping to make sense of the barrage of information hurled one's way. People in society have become dependent upon various apps and devices, which at first bring joy and satisfaction but can quickly begin to tyrannize one's attention. Processing all of this information can be overwhelming and on top of this, many who are in organizations are expected to multi-task, but scientific evidence now suggests that multi-tasking is an impossible act and that the illusion of multi-tasking, which is actually a constant and rapid shift of attention, is shortening the attention span (Meyer et al, 1997; Yirka, 2015).

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the need and value of mindfulness, by way of self-leadership, in the workplace. As gathered from research studies, books, interviews, and talks, this paper will highlight and review the major themes of inquiry and reflection, values-based leadership, stress management, and provide a discussion and critique of modern mindfulness. In the process of summarizing and presenting this evidence in the rationale below, the *Doing from*

Being curriculum will be introduced and then woven in. The proposed *Doing from Being* curriculum, which incorporates key findings from the evidence, aims to promote organizational integrity through mindful self-leadership across all levels of the organization.

The *Doing from Being* Model

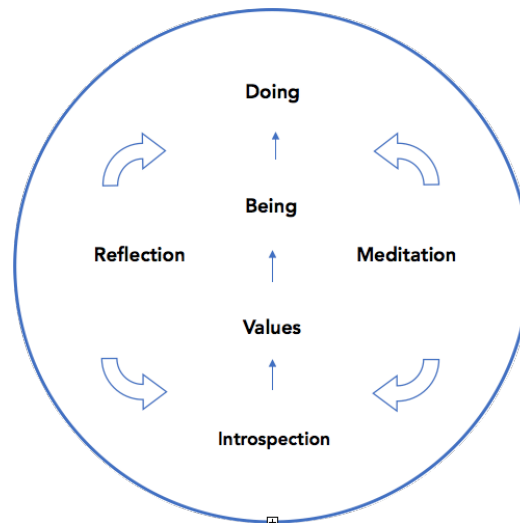
Doing from Being: Creating Organizational Integrity Through Mindful Self-Leadership is a mindfulness curriculum for those of all levels who work in the organizational setting. The intention is to provide an accessible, long-term program that develops the whole person. When an organization has this same intention, the result is an organization of people, from top to bottom, who are working toward personal holism or integrity. This is what creates organizational integrity. The content of the program is much more than a series of techniques or performance enhancement exercises, but rather a leadership method that fosters holistic change from the inside out. The theory is that in order to lead effectively, one must first have the capacity and courage to lead themselves.

The program begins with an inquiry into one's current value system. The intention is to understand how participants are living their values by examining current behaviors and actions. Participants must then decide if the values discovered are the values, they would like to frame their lives around. If not, participants will then go through a process of uncovering what values they would like to emulate, how they want to live, and the person they want to be in their personal and professional lives. Various exercises and practices will be used to achieve this and for those whose values have not changed very dramatically, there will be an opportunity to refine those values.

Business culture can be much more achievement oriented and many are not aware that they are living within unconscious belief structures. Everyone lives by a value system, whether it is conscious or not is the foundation of this program. Once participants have discovered and

refined their values, they then attempt to intentionally live by them. They begin to pay attention to and notice how their new set of values are playing out. Creating new patterns can be quite challenging and it does not happen automatically. Because of this challenge, plenty of support will be provided through this stage both through group and individual coaching sessions as well as supportive practices designed for integration and confidence building. Mindfulness is naturally developed in this stage due to the constant attention that is required in order to monitor behaviors and actions. One of the main exercises of the program will be a daily journaling practice. Participants will be asked to review their day in order to see and understand the connection between their values and their behavior. After working with this over several weeks and months, new patterns of behavior are created that reflect intentional values and living them becomes almost automatic. In the program this is referred to as an ‘intentional way of being’ or simply ‘being’.

When one’s way of being is consistent with one’s values, one’s doing arises naturally from this intentional space. This entire process is embedded in a field of mindfulness practice and reflection. By developing the skills of mindfulness and reflection, participants create a practice of checking in and being accountable to their own value system that they have created. The model below represents a continuous feedback loop of awareness that aligns participants to their deepest and most true intentions, which is the essence of *Doing from Being*.



Introspection leads to identifying our values and core beliefs – living by our intentional values leads to an intentional way of being – our doing (actions, behaviors) naturally arise out of this new way of being.

The course of the program will take place over 8 weeks and will include two in-person group sessions (one at the beginning and one at the end), online group and individual coaching sessions, journaling, and mindfulness and reflection practice.

Mindfulness Defined

The roots of mindfulness extend back 2,600 years. The method uses an anchor, such as the breath, to center attention and bring awareness into the present moment. The goal of mindfulness is to build skill in observing the mind's constant movement. Thoughts, anxieties, regrets, etc. are constantly cycling through the mind, influencing behavior, and if left unobserved, running the show of one's life. If one can learn to watch the mind, then a sense of agency is achieved over its operation, thus providing a way to live more intentionally, resulting in less stress, better decision making, and less reactivity. Mindfulness practice educates the mind to focus on the present moment in all activities and to accept the reality of any situation or event as it arises.

Psychologist Ela Amarie of the Swiss consultancy firm, *Mindful Brain*, observes three characteristics of mindfulness: intention, attention, and attitude (Amarie, n.d). Mindfulness practitioners set the intention to be present and bring attention to whatever is happening (noting sights, sounds, thoughts, feelings, etc.) around them and to whatever activity they are performing (meeting with coworkers, checking email, eating lunch). There is natural attitudinal adjustment that takes place over time due to this quality of attention — one that is nonjudgmental, patient, trusting, nonreactive, relaxed, and open.

As a norm, the mind is constantly running programs of conditioned patterns which mostly consist of thoughts of the past and future. The pattern of thoughts about the past oftentimes consist of a ‘greatest hits’ of memories of remorse, regret, fear, or trauma, while typical thoughts about the future consist of worst-case scenarios, fears, and anxiety. The act of mindfulness requires complete engagement (not obsession) with the present moment from an attitude of objective acceptance. Baer et al. (2006) describes a spectrum of mindfulness across five separate but interrelated dimensions: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judgement, and non-reaction, and understand this spectrum to be an accurate descriptive construct of the results mindfulness practice. Their findings suggest that conceptualizing mindfulness as a multifaceted activity is helpful in understanding its components and its relationships with other variables. Mindfulness operates across the entire field of experience and is more of a way of being and not merely a technique that is implemented from time to time.

The primary goal of mindfulness is recognition and acceptance of thoughts and feelings. Many may rather avoid observing the inner workings of their minds perhaps because when not multitasking, one tends to think about things that have not been figured out, such as various difficulties and challenges that can dominate thoughts until a satisfactory solution is found. A

series of experiments conducted by Timothy Wilson at the University of Virginia found that the majority of more than 700 study participants found it unpleasant to be in a room with only their thoughts as company. In one of the experiments, participants were left in a room with a button that when pressed, would illicit an uncomfortable and for some painful shock. Sixty-seven percent of men and 25 percent of women opted to shock themselves repeatedly rather than sit quietly with their thoughts (Wilson, 2014). The 17th century mathematician and physicist Blaise Pascal offered an incredibly insightful window into the human condition, illustrated quite accurately in this study when he said, “All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone” (Pascal, 1964). In today’s world, with its limitless opportunities for distraction, mindfulness can help individuals accept what they find as they observe their own minds, thereby lowering stress and gaining the much-needed ability to focus their attention on what Zen teacher Cheri Huber calls ‘thisherenow’ (this here now) (Huber, 2007).

The Value and Benefits of Mindfulness in the Organizational Setting

Over the years, there have been experts who have advocated various leadership styles. Leaders in organizations who are searching for solutions, typically adopt whatever style is currently popular. Though this makes sense from an expediency and consumerist standpoint, the danger is that it can be perceived by others as inauthentic. If one’s leadership style is dependent exclusively upon the latest fad, this may lead to confusion, inconsistency, dissatisfaction, and mistrust among those being led. The leader should not attempt to create a persona, character, or a facade to hide behind, rather what one is aiming for is a deep authenticity. This is what customers, coworkers, and employees are looking for. Mindfulness can effectively help navigate a path for leaders to remain in-line with what truly matters to them, their company, and their stakeholders.

The *Doing from Being* model requires that one becomes aware of what they truly value. Mindfulness enables the leader to come to terms with the ever-changing nature of situations and people and how to respond appropriately from a place of authentic being. The mindful leader can face the reality of any situation from a space of calm stability and communicate clearly. Those they lead know that the decisions made come from a place of honest awareness, integrity, and courage. And, above all, the mindful leader inspires others to achieve beyond even their own vision.

Mindfulness is being used as a leadership tool throughout the business world and studies have shown it to be effective in lowering healthcare costs, increasing employee productivity, helping employees stay on task, and reducing employee stress. Gloria Mark, professor of Informatics at the University of California, Irvine, studies technology and its effects on workers. Her research has shown that office workers are interrupted or self-interrupt every three minutes during the typical work day. The distractions range from purely digital forms such as social media and email to human ones such as small talk from coworkers and phone calls from friends and family. An interesting finding from her ongoing observation of the workplace shows that on average, employees visit Facebook twenty-one times a day and check email seventy-four times (Mark, 2018). David Gelles (2016) has profiled companies as diverse as Google, Aetna, General Mills, and Target, all of whom have created extensive programs aimed to foster mindful leadership practices among their employees. And, according to a UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School study, led by Kimberly Schaufenbuel (n.d.) the benefits of mindfulness can lead to “improvements in innovative thinking, communication skills, and more appropriate reactions to stress” (p. 12).

The following are some specific cases in which mindfulness has greatly benefitted organizations.

Mindfulness Training at Aetna Lowers Cost of Healthcare

The CEO, Mark Bertolini, began the company's mindfulness programs after mindfulness helped him deal with chronic pain as the result of a skiing accident. It began with a small pilot program with 239 employees. The participants in the twelve-week course reported significant stress reduction. According to the World Health Organization, stress costs American businesses an estimated \$300 billion annually and the cost to our healthcare system may be even greater due to the role stress plays in many other conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, etc. Over one-quarter of Aetna's work force of fifty-thousand, has participated in at least one mindfulness course. Participants reported a 28% reduction in their stress levels, a 20% improvement in sleep quality, and a 19% reduction in pain. Participants also showed greater production on the job, gaining an average of sixty-two minutes per week of productivity, which Aetna estimates at being worth \$3,000 per employee per year. Also found, was that annual healthcare costs among participants were an average of \$2,000 lower than their coworkers who didn't participate. Aetna is continuing to expand the program significantly, to include a full third of its employees (Gelles, 2017).

Intel Employees Report Increased Creativity and Focus

Intel began its Awake@Intel program in 2012 with 1,500 employees, participating in a nineteen-session course. The employees were asked to rank their levels of stress and happiness on a ten-point scale. When the sessions were completed, participants reported that their average levels of stress had decreased by two points, and their levels of happiness increased by three points. Furthermore, they reported a two-point increase in having new ideas, insights, mental clarity, creativity, the ability to focus, the quality of relationships at work, and the level of engagement in meetings, projects and team efforts (Schaufenbuel, n.d.). Even though self-

reporting is difficult to quantify, Intel considers the results significant enough to expand the program to more than 10,000 employees.

Increased Concentration and Injury Reduction at Keurig Green Mountain

What began as a program limited to top executives, mindfulness has become an integral part of the corporate culture at Keurig Green Mountain (formerly Green Mountain Coffee), from corporate officers to warehouse employees. Founder Robert P. Stiller initially offered meditation programs to high-level executives and then mid-level employees. The results were so positive, especially in terms of stress reduction, that the program was expanded company wide.

Green Mountain now offers mindful stretching exercises for warehouse and factory workers before each shift. Employees who initially resisted the program now report lower levels of job-related pain at the end of their workweek and an increased ability to focus on the job. Green Mountain has also seen a significant reduction in workplace injuries and not just because workers are getting their daily stretch. Gelles (2014) reports that the mindful stretching “has made workers more attuned to their surroundings, more aware of their own behavior and, therefore, more disciplined in their execution of tasks on the factory floor” (p. 94).

These are just a few examples of the benefits that mindfulness provides organizations. As can be seen, these benefits cover almost every facet of corporate life, from personal to professional, from physical to mental, emotional, and psychological. One can even see a correlation between the bottom line, as far as overall employee cost in terms of healthcare and productivity, and employee wellness (Gelles, 2017).

The Importance of Inquiry & Reflection

The *Doing from Being* model begins with inquiry and reflection into one one’s current and aspirational values. This is the foundation of the program and absolutely essential.

Reflection is an invaluable learning tool that some may avoid simply because it feels safer to not

question core beliefs, attitudes, and biases. Examining long-held truths can potentially produce significant anxiety which can become an obstacle to effective inquiry.

Another potential obstacle is the value that our society puts on quick thinking. Valuing speed makes sense due to the fast-paced nature of modern life where there seems to be hardly any time for careful judgment and gradual wisdom. Often, beginning in grade school, teachers reward those with quick answers, leaving more deliberate and thoughtful children behind. The anxiety this causes may follow children well into adulthood and even throughout their entire lives. Organizational consultant Joshua Ehrlich describes this attitude reflected in the business world as rewarding a "... take-charge, action orientation, and so leaders believe it is better to 'shoot first and ask questions later'" (Ehrlich, 2012, p. 19). Studies have shown the common practice of leaders who focus on immediately available data and solutions, even when there is no time pressure and when a systematic approach would yield a better result (Menkes, 2007).

Reflection and inquiry will initially slow processes down, but ultimately, they make leaders more effective and efficient in attaining their goal (much like the famous tortoise and the hare story). Moving too slowly can also be risky. Balance is key in making important decisions. Impatience can be effective, but often it is not paired with consideration for whether it is a good time to move slow or fast.

Companies who have adopted disciplined approaches to decision-making, have been shown to have consistently better results (Hieke, 2010), whereas unruly decision-making and lack of reflection can be quite costly. The 2008 financial crisis is a good example of this, where short-term tactical results were favored over long-term solutions. This pattern created a pace that was entirely unsustainable.

Emphasis on short-term goals creates an environment where reflection is not valued, thus there is no time for organizations to learn from their mistakes. Just as individuals can find

reflection uncomfortable, Chris Argyris has found organizations mirroring this discomfort on a much larger scale. He found that organizations create a variety of defensive postures in order to avoid embarrassment of perceived failure and conflict (Argyris, 2006). Companies tend to reward employees for not taking risks and staying with the tried and true. But in an ever-changing world, adaptability is crucial, and this requires reflection. The *Doing from Being* model begins with reflecting deeply on one's essential values.

Evolving Theories in Leadership

A new conversation has begun, bolstered by the increasing complexity of organizations, centered around an interest in leadership that is not limited to a top-down model. Evidence shows that leadership is important throughout the organization and not just in roles labelled 'leader'. Leaders at the top may not have "sufficient and relevant information to make highly effective decisions in a fast-changing and complex world" (Pearce and Conger, 2003, p. 2) and many critical important, especially specialized issues cannot be addressed by single leaders, even those at the top. The newest leadership models are far different from more traditional top-down models of leadership (Senge and Kaeufer 2001; Fletcher and Kaeufer 2003; Fletcher 2004). Rather than a focus on a set of personal characteristics and attributes, in new theories of leadership, people who are normally thought of as leaders, heads of departments, directors, team leaders, etc, are recognized as being supported by a network of people engaging in leadership practices throughout the organization and most of which will never acquire the label of leader. For this to be effective, organizations must encourage development of the whole person. Mindfulness and values-based inquiry fits this need perfectly.

This evolving view of leadership is illustrated well in what is known as postheroic leadership.

... postheroic leadership re-envisioning the 'who' and 'where' of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute the tasks and responsibilities of leadership up, down, and across the hierarchy. It re-envisioning the 'what' of leadership by articulating leadership as a social process that occurs in and through human interactions, and it articulates the 'how' of leadership by focusing on the more mutual, less hierarchical leadership practices and skills needed to engage collaborative, collective learning. It is generally recognized that this shift – from individual to collective, from control to learning, from 'self' to 'self-in-relation', and from power over to power with – is a paradigm shift in what it means to be a positional leader (Fletcher 2004, p 650).

Some have suggested that the heroic model, or the traditional top-down model, never accurately represented leadership realities anyway, even historically (Gronn 2002; 2003; Fletcher and Kaeufer 2003; Seers et al 2003). Simpson and Hill (2008) explore William Wilberforce's leadership and the abolition of the slavery. Despite the wide belief of Wilberforce as the leader associated with abolition, they argue he was not alone, but one among many others not identified as 'leaders' as such but who nonetheless took important leadership roles in this radical change. Leadership is relational (Uhl-Bien 2006) and contextual (Osborn et al 2002); it is insufficiently explained by the structure of leaders and followers.

The *Doing from Being* model is crafted for this modern view of leadership as it acknowledges that everyone in an organization is a leader. From this view, it becomes necessary to value and develop every person. This development begins with inquiring into one's value system, because it is from here that one leads.

Values-Based Leadership

The broad base and the all-pervasive theme of the *Doing from Being* program is mindfulness but when it comes to the practicality of influencing others' as leaders, the aim is to

lead from one's core values. When leading from values, organizational integrity is the result. One can define an organization as a place of gathered people who work together under a coordinate discipline in order to realize a shared purpose. A common purpose must be shared to create a cohesive environment and to effectively meet objectives, otherwise disharmony pervades and inefficiency rules. This is popularly known throughout the leadership world as *Values-Based Leadership* (VBL). VBL is a leadership style where the leader-follower relationship is formed around a set of axial values. Instead of focusing on supervision, exact control, and hierarchy, VBL concentrates on shared values and insights (Shatalebi, 2011).

The importance of values has been highlighted by the many high-profile scandals of the last several years. Though scandals have been pervasive throughout history, modern technology makes the information more available and therefore more common. Unethical behavior is not limited to the elite and powerful. Anyone is susceptible to poor decision-making because everyone faces daily conflicts due to heightened organizational demands, client pressures, or the desire to protect one's job. Leading from a common set of values protects the organization and the people within it.

Inquiring into values makes one's choices much clearer. There are natural tensions that exist between values, to be certain, and acknowledging these tensions is essential to maintaining integrity (Ehrlich, 2012). Articulating our values and purpose also helps us stay in-line with our long-term goals, which is essential to operating harmoniously within an organization. When our values are aligned with our goals, we put more effort behind them, are more successful in achieving them, and feel a greater sense of well-being as we work toward them (Sheldon, 1999). There is also less confusion. All members of a team must have a general idea of where they are trying to go and a shared pathway to get there, otherwise chaos ensues. Some chaos is fine, to be sure - creativity relies on it - but chaos must be held within a container of common values.

William George, a professor and researcher at Harvard Business School, creates and runs corporate training programs around the world, his most famous being his *True North* seminars. His overlying philosophy is that one must understand themselves and become aligned with their value system – one’s true north – in order maximize one’s contribution.

Just as a compass points toward a magnetic field, your True North pulls you toward the purpose of your leadership. When you follow your internal compass, your leadership will be authentic, and people will naturally want to associate with you. Although others may guide or influence you, your truth is derived from your life story and only you can determine what it should be (George, 2007, p. xxiii).

When all members of organization seek to discover their personal values, an axis of commonality is formed. Within the organization the methods by which this discovery is facilitated varies, but often consists of small group discussions or reflection exercises where the participants explore their values, goals, and purpose and how well their individual findings align with the organizations long-term goals. While an individual’s goals may seem distant from the organization’s goals, they need not be so distant. Asking individuals in an organization to ask of themselves existential questions makes sense from an organizational standpoint in that if one’s personal values align with the organization’s mission, there is a much greater chance that the energy of the employee will naturally be channeled to succeed along with the organization. Organizations whose employees understand and align with the corporate mission, values, and goals enjoy a 29 percent greater return than organizations who do not see this as a priority (Watson Wyatt, 2004).

Typical among many leadership programs is that once the end is reached, it can be difficult to get employees to continue developing the skills of inquiry. One reason for this is that inquiry is often left until the end of the program when participants energy levels are at their

lowest. Additionally, once the program is over, there is very little follow up. “Thinking about purpose becomes overshadowed by the press of the organization’s short-term goals. The discipline of reflection ends up not being integrated into employee’s objectives or ways of working” (Ehrlich, 2012, p. 53).

Joshua Ehrlich (2012) demonstrated an ideal long-term values-centered program design for a company called Diageo which is the largest spirits, wine, and beer company in the world. Its best-known brands are Baileys, Guinness, and Smirnoff. Diageo picked its top nine hundred executives to participate in a year-long leadership program incorporating week-long events and intensive one-on-one coaching. The participants created a written description of their life purpose and shared it with their colleagues. They were asked to connect their purpose with the company’s overall purpose. Many of the participants realized that their purpose centered on developing others and helping them become successful, at home and at work. Each participant was also asked to write a “leadership possibility” – a story written five years in the future that looked back on accomplishments and growth. They envisioned their best self, imagining breakthroughs that they achieved and their positive impact on the organization.

This opportunity paved a pathway to embed reflective practices, optimism, and creativity into the DNA of the organization. After the program, Diageo collected return on investment data and the early information was very promising. During the course of the program, the company’s employee engagement scores went up 14 percent – the largest increase in the company’s history (Ehrlich, 2012).

Personal values aligning with the organization’s values can be a very powerful force. The company’s values must be broad enough to be inclusive of a diverse set of individuals, but also specific enough for everyone to unite behind a common mission. Creating a set of values and demanding people get behind them may create resentment and dissatisfaction, but if employees

are given the space and opportunity to lead themselves and offer their unique contribution, all will benefit. The organization must invest in its people and then its people will invest in the organization.

Stress Management

Stress is not a negative word. One needs stress. This may sound counterintuitive but if one does not experience stress, one does not grow. The physical body needs exercise, which is a form of stress, in order to stay healthy. The brain benefits greatly through problem solving. Periodic stress is a positive which can make one stronger, smarter, healthier, and more resilient. But just like most things, too much of it can be a detriment (McEwan, 2004).

Most people have experienced heightened stress by being spread too thin, overloaded with work, or simply by worrying constantly about the future. Extreme stress causes the primitive centers of our brain to engage our instinctual, animal, fight-or-flight response (Gilkey, 2007). In these situations, the logical brain is bypassed, and flexibility and performance suffer. When worry about failure is prioritized, one becomes reluctant to experiment with new behaviors, and thus less able to learn.

Whether stress is too low or too high, both can lead to less than optimal learning and performance. Observing the level and quality of stress is crucial in order to optimize performance. Human beings must self-regulate physically, cognitively and emotionally in response to environmental challenges (Carver and Scheier, 1998). Relating with and interpreting the world is crucial for healthy functioning in the world. Mindfulness helps to regulate stress by creating a gap between stimulus and response, which is especially important in the organizational environment where there can be an overwhelming amount of information to assimilate and where simple decisions can have great affect on many people. And, as Carver and Scheir point out, regulation must happen on multiple levels. For example, in the same way that one must

physically self-regulate to maintain core temperature in the face of fluctuations in air temperature, one must mentally self-regulate in order to maintain a sense of coherence and well-being in the face of conflicts to one's beliefs, attitudes, or preferences. Mental self-regulation involves striving to harmonize with external experience and then to respond appropriately (Atkins, 2008). Mindfulness is a tool for regulation.

The academic literature on stress is exhaustive and conclusive. Chronic stress can lead to cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and allergies by creating inflammation that wears down the immune system (Dingfelder, 2008). As many as 90 percent of complaints seen by physicians seem to be stress related (Thames, 2018). Stress also contributes to the development of mental illness, including anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and various personality disorders (Ehrlich, 2012).

Mindfulness practice has been shown to have a direct impact on stress including enhanced mental and physical functioning. Even beyond stress reduction, it has been shown to alleviate hypertension, arthritis, insomnia, inflammation, cancer, depression, and infertility (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Cortisol, which is a hormone released by the adrenal glands, mobilizes the body to face challenges, but when continuously released, can cause organs to break down. This is what can happen when consistently under stress. In addition to this, cortisol can interfere with creativity, learning, and critical thinking (Goleman, 2008). Cortisol is also released during thrill seeking activities such as bungee jumping and sky-diving (Gonzalez, 2005). Just as the stress of taking on too much at work can cloud judgement, so can high intensity activities. Overloading the system is not congruent with intelligent decision-making.

Marianne Frankenhaeuser, a Swedish researcher, measured cortisol levels in employees at the highest and lowest levels of a number of large organizations. She found that high levels of cortisol resulting from stress is associated with an experience of helplessness and lack of control,

which was much more prevalent in those at lower levels. Top-level executives also experienced stress but this was balanced out with a greater sense of control over their environments (1991).

Meditation and mindfulness have been shown to lower cortisol levels in the blood (Ricard, 2007). This enables one to make far better decisions in the moment. Mindfulness also increases awareness of the body. The information received from the body can become more refined thus enabling one to better self-monitor and understand the level of stress being experienced. When one is able to tune into the body and understand the information being received, one is able to attend to the body and act accordingly. This includes basic needs such as diet, sleep, and proper exercise, which all can be forgotten during periods of chronic stress.

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz (2001) believe that corporate executives should treat themselves as if they were high-performance athletes. The term they prefer is “corporate athlete.” They believe one’s life should be approached holistically, keeping all aspects equal and healthy. “...our integrated theory of performance management addresses the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit. We call this hierarchy the *performance pyramid*. Each of its levels profoundly influences the others, and failure to address any one of them compromises performance” (p. 118). Their approach has been tested on thousands of executives, with dramatic results, including improved work performance and enhanced health and happiness. The philosophy is simple:

In training athletes, we have never focused on their primary skills—how to hit a serve, swing a golf club, or shoot a basketball. Likewise, in business we don’t address primary competencies such as public speaking, negotiating, or analyzing a balance sheet. Our efforts aim instead to help executives build their capacity for what might be called focus. Increasing capacity at all levels allows athletes and executives alike to bring their talents and skills to full ignition and to sustain high performance over time—a condition we

call the *Ideal Performance State* (IPS)...Put simply, the best long-term performers tap into positive energy at all levels of the performance pyramid (p. 119).

This is exactly the philosophy behind *Doing from Being*. By building inner competency through mindfulness and self-reflection, all areas of one's life become infused with thorough, present awareness. One does not have to sift through every single specific nuance and problem related to their work and try to solve it. One simply needs to thoroughly examine themselves, their behavior, and the person they would like to be, in all aspects of life and then seek to improve by becoming more present to their current situation in mind, body, and environment. If one works to improve the mind, no matter the degree, everything else will follow.

One could also call the stress that one experiences in the mind, psychological stress. In the end, this may be the greatest if not the single source of stress (Sharma, 2014). The ancient Greek philosopher Epictetus in A.D. 85 said that stress is not caused by events themselves but by how one thinks about the events (Epictetus, 1955). One cannot control outside events. The only control anyone has over their stress is how they experience and process it internally. It may feel good to shift blame to circumstances, but this can only last so long. Eventually, one must take responsibility and address their internal experience. This is exactly what mindfulness addresses. By looking deeply within, one can find the root cause of their stress and do the work to alleviate it. Once one becomes aware of their internal processes, the rest of the work is fairly simple. *Doing from Being* takes this process on from the very beginning.

Problems with the Commodification of Mindfulness

An entire thesis could be written on this topic alone. Since the practical aspect of this thesis is to create a mindfulness program for organizations, I thought it necessary to discuss the current issues surrounding modern mindfulness teaching. The broader use of mindfulness in

industry is completely new and still evolving. With the growth of mindfulness has come significant controversy, and not just from one side.

David Gelles (2012) tells the story of a conference he attended in San Francisco. The conference was put on by Google and was basically a celebration of the popularity of mindfulness and meditation in the workplace, and in particular in Silicon Valley. In one of the sessions entitled, *Corporate Mindfulness, the Google Way*, two executives weren't far into their presentation when protestors interrupted. The protestors commandeered the stage with signs and bullhorns in hand. Their message concerned the San Francisco housing shortage. "Wisdom means stop displacement! Wisdom means stop surveillance! San Francisco is not for sale!", they chanted until they were led off stage by security guards. The Google executives were flustered, and all of this was caught on video and promptly uploaded to YouTube. Most popular among the scenes was that of a giant security guard dressed in black in a shoving match with a tiny, highly motivated young woman. All of this taking place at a conference about meditation.

This confrontation was bound to happen. It brought to the forefront the conflict between corporations and organizations that are seeking to use mindfulness meditation practices to improve personal wellness, to be sure, but also employee productivity, and the bottom line. After the scene from above, one of the protestors who happened to be a Buddhist, explained why she disrupted the conference. "Just like the gentrification of a neighborhood where new, wealthy people displace people who have lived there longer, the dharma (Buddhist teachings) is undergoing a process of gentrification in San Francisco today. Lost is the bigger picture of the teachings that asks us to consider our interdependence and to move beyond self-help and addressing only our own suffering. The dharma directs us to feel the suffering of others."

The disapproval of the role of mindfulness in the organizational setting comes from all sides, not just from those who seek to keep mindfulness tied to its authentic roots. Traditional

Buddhists are concerned with capitalism's attempts at seizing mindfulness. Secularists are concerned that seeming spiritual practices are being used in the place of work. The far right is concerned that mindfulness is a Trojan horse for Eastern beliefs and practices. And even secular mindfulness practitioners are concerned that with the quickening of mindfulness as a technique, vital nuances of the practice are being lost.

Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at Brown University, Willoughby Britton, points out that mindfulness today is much more in the domain of science than religion.

The main delivery system for Buddhist meditation in the modern West isn't Buddhism; it is science, medicine, and schools. There is a tidal wave behind this movement. MBSR practitioners already account for the majority of new meditators, and soon they are going to be the vast majority. If Buddhists want to have any say, they better stop criticizing and start collaborating, working with instead of just against. Otherwise, they might get left in the dust of the 'McMindfulness' movement (Tricycle, 2014, p. 28).

It's difficult to pin down only one reason why some Buddhists are upset with the modern mindfulness movement. Yes, the traditional aspects of the religion don't exist in the workplace and the broader philosophical teachings of Buddhism, within which mindfulness plays a substantial role, is not expounded, but if people are meditating, and are becoming better people, is there a problem? Nowhere can it be found that the Buddha was attempting to create Buddhists or even a Buddhism. He was simply the teacher of techniques that revealed a direct path to know the nature of the self and one's experience. And even the Buddha himself suggested that tradition and even his teachings be constantly questioned and put up against the scrutiny of personal experience.

Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumor, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious

reasoning, nor upon bias towards a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher.' When you yourselves know: 'These things are bad, blamable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them. When you yourselves know: 'These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them (Bodhi, 2012, p. 280).

One criticism of Buddhist traditionalists is that when mindfulness is separated from the tradition from which it was born, it is at best incomplete and at worst, potentially harmful. When mindfulness is used as only a technique to improve performance and the bottom line, it becomes more about bolstering the ego rather than the dissolution of the ego, which was the intention of the Buddha. One of the proponents of this style of secular mindfulness and one who has received her fair-share of criticism from traditionalists is Ariana Huffington. In a Huffington Post article (2015), she writes: “There’s nothing touchy-feely about increased profits. This is a tough economy. Stress reduction and mindfulness don’t just make us happier and healthier, they’re proven competitive advantage for any business that wants one” (). As true as this may be, is the happiness that this style of mindfulness provides real, actual happiness? Or is it simply ego satisfaction as a job well done.

Professors and Zen practitioners David Loy and Ron Purser wrote a widely read article (2013), which also happened to appear on the Huffington Post website, in which they lay out a strong case against the capitalist-style mindfulness approach.

Uncoupling mindfulness from its ethical and religious Buddhist context is understandable as an expedient move to make such training a viable product on the open market. The rush to secularize and commodify mindfulness into a marketable technique may be leading to an unfortunate denaturing of this ancient practice, which was intended

for far more than relieving a headache, reducing blood pressure, or helping executives become better focused and more productive (p. 5).

Their most cogent and potent argument is that mindfulness without the ethical framework in which it was founded upon is aimless and quite possibly dangerous.

While a stripped-down, secularized technique...may make it more palatable to the corporate world, decontextualizing mindfulness from its original liberative and transformative purpose, as well as its foundation in social ethics, amounts to a Faustian bargain. Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals and organizations from the unwholesome roots of greed, ill will and delusion, it is usually being refashioned into a banal, therapeutic, self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots (p. 6).

Though this may be true to some extent, this approach seems to be a bit hyperbolic, fearful, and perhaps even edging toward conspiratorial. Nothing humans do is perfect and almost anything seen to be pure and uncorrupt probably isn't. Meditation and mindfulness, in the opinion of this author, should be anywhere and everywhere. When one introspects, one has the opportunity to peer into the nature of who they are as a human being but also as a living, breathing, being in the universe. If one learns meditation in middle of the Himalayas from a celebrated guru or in a board room at a major corporation from an executive coach, the potential to discover something remarkable is right there. The practice and the individual must be trusted, and only then can the practice truly work. *Doing from Being* is an attempt to provide a pathway of self-discovery, and if along the way profits and production improve, then so be it.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this literature review was to cover some of the major themes of the program that the author has written: *Doing from Being: Creating Organizational Integrity*

Through Mindful Self-Leadership. These themes are ones that are essential in addressing the growing busyness and stress within organizations. It is not enough to simply talk about these issues or sit through single seminars that do not require engagement or follow-through from the participants. What is needed is radical transformation, and this must begin with the individual. This transformation must go far beyond the organization, into the lives of each person involved within the organization. The organization must be invested in the whole person. If not, then it is a wasted opportunity to create positive change in the lives of many.

Organizations affect not only the lives of the people who work within them, but also the people that they provide services for. When unhappy, stressed-out, selfish people make decisions that affect the lives of thousands, even millions of people, it is a disservice to humanity and the organization should be held accountable. The potential for positive change is unbounded in the organizational world but what many have seen is the potential for destruction, and for good reason. Organizations are seen to prioritize the bottom line at the expense of employees, consumers, and the environment.

Organizations must have the best interests of all people in mind and it can start by creating a culture of leading from the inside out - from values that lead to wiser and more beneficial decision-making for all involved. Organizations must be invested for the long-term in creating more meaningful, mindful, and compassionate outcomes. *Doing from Being* seeks to assist in making this potential aspiration a reality.

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